



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

NORWOOD, NEW YORK 13668



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ

*Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshipers.*

*Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov. Priest-in-Charge, 323-851-7898
Fr. Alexy Karlgut, Dean/Administrator, 607-759-1833*

Please join us for prayer and fellowship.

Upcoming Services:
Saturday, Dec 31, Jan 7
Great Vespers: 5pm

Sunday, January 1, 8
Divine Liturgy: 10am

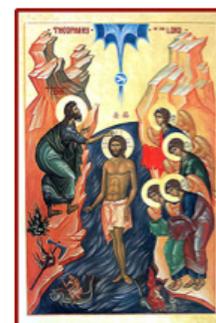
**Coffee and fellowship will
follow the service**

*The above services are at St.
Olympia Church
34 North Main Street
Norwood, NY, 13668*

*Mailing Address
St. Olympia Orthodox Church
PO Box 122 Canton, NY13617*

The Theophany of our Lord January 6

*Prepare, O Zebulon,
and adorn yourself, O Naphtali!
River Jordan, cease flowing,
and receive with joy the Master coming to be baptized!
Adam, rejoice with our first Mother,
and do not hide yourselves as you did of old in Paradise;
for having seen you naked,
He has appeared to clothe you with the first garment.
Christ has appeared to renew all creation.*



Troparion of the Forefeast



*When You, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest.
For the voice of the Father bore witness to You,
and called You His beloved Son;
and the Spirit in the form of a dove
confirmed the truthfulness of His word.
O Christ our God, You have revealed Yourself
and hast enlightened the world, glory to You.*

Troparion of Theophany

Afterfeast of Theophany

*By fire and the Spirit,
You wash away the sin of the world.
When the Baptist saw You coming, he was afraid.
He trembled and cried out, saying:
"I dare not hold Your spotless head.
Sanctify me with Your Epiphany,
O Master Who loves mankind!"
Vespers, Aposticha*



Theophany: The Feast of Humility

Reflections in Christ, Fr. Lawrence Farley

Theophany is the feast of God's humility. Humility is not something normally associated with power. Powerful people and rich people and important people aren't usually humble, because they don't have to be. It is the poor and powerless who have to be humble. The powerful can dictate, and rage, and give orders, not caring whether or not they are liked, for they are answerable to few or none. The poor man, the one who works for a boss at minimum wage and needs every penny and dare not lose his job, must keep a civil tongue in his head. If the boss yells at him unjustly, he can only smile and make entreaties. It is as Solomon says, "The poor man uses entreaties; the rich answer roughly" (Proverbs 18:23). This makes our human situation all the stranger: on this planet, it is sinners and mortal men who are proud, who live with swollen wills, and who rage when that will is crossed. It is God, the Mighty One, who is humble.

We see this divine humility throughout the entire life of Christ. In the way that He entered this life and in the way that He left it, He manifested the divine humility and showed where true glory lay hidden. Though He was the Mighty King, worshipped by angels and archangels and by all the vast company of heaven, He entered His world as a child born not to a princess, but to a simple peasant girl of Galilee. His legal father and guardian was not a king or even a servant of kings, but a carpenter, an artisan who had to earn his living by the sweat of his brow. His parents were of such modest means that when the time came for His mother to offer the sacrifice in the Temple for her purification, she offered not the usual sacrifice of a lamb and a pigeon, but the sacrifice of the poor, two pigeons (Leviticus 12:6-8, Luke 2:24). At the time of His birth, earth had no place for Him, so that He was born in a cavern, and laid in a manger—i.e. a feeding trough for animals. (Calling it a "manger" sounds so much more romantic.) It was the same when He left this world, for not only did He die the shameful death of a slave by being crucified, and numbered with criminals, He did not even have a tomb of His own to be buried in. Rather, He had to borrow the tomb of another. Evidently there were no depths of humility and humiliation to which God was not ready to sink for our sakes.

The center-piece of this divine humility is our feast of Theophany. Christ was baptized to set His seal upon the controversial ministry of John. There were only two views regarding John—some considered him a true prophet, sent by God after the silence of centuries, while others considered him a crack-pot, propelled not by God's Spirit but by his own demented ego. Those who considered John to be a true prophet came to be baptized, and so Jesus came to join them, setting His seal on John's work. He came to the waters of baptism in solidarity with sinners, surrounded by tax-collectors and former prostitutes and others whose consciences smote them and filled their hearts with shame. Even as He would later hang on the Cross among thieves, so He waded into the water among sinners, for the steps leading down to the Jordan were the first steps on the long road to Golgotha. As He once laid aside the form of God to take on the form of a slave (Philippians 2:6-7), so now once again He laid aside His clothes to enter the cold waters of this life and stood in the Jordan River before an amazed John.

This divine humility sets the pattern for our life as well. If our God has shown such humility, we must ourselves lay aside the vestments of pride and walk more lightly upon the earth. Too often we strut, stepping heavily as if we were kings. When our will is thwarted, we rage as if we were the center of the universe—even if the thwarting of our will consisted of nothing more than too much traffic in the road in front of us. If Christ our God, the high king of heaven, lived such a life of shining humility on earth, we must follow after Him. When our will is thwarted, let us not rage, but quietly intone the prayer, "Teach me to treat whatever may happen to me throughout the day with peace of soul and with firm conviction that Your will governs all". This is true humility, and this is our true glory. For the feast of Theophany reveals the glory of God walking among men, and the only path to peace.

Baptism: "When all is said and done..."

Reflections in Christ, Father Steven Kostoff

"The aim of the Christian life is to return to that perfect grace of the most holy and life-giving Spirit, which was originally conferred upon us through divine baptism"—Saint Ignatius Xanthopoulos and Saint Kallistos

Our recent celebration of the Great Feast of Theophany—the Baptism of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ—provides a fitting context in which to reflect upon the great Mystery of Holy Baptism. We can do this effectively by turning to some of the great saints and theologians of the Church, who consistently and brilliantly speak of the meaning of this Sacrament of Illumination. At times, what they have to say may seem to be "unrealistic"—as if their rhetorical skills in describing the effect of Baptism outstrip a realistic assessment of Baptism as experienced by the great majority of members of the Church. However, we should also keep in mind that the Fathers of the Church were "maximalists" when describing and delineating the full effect of the "life in Christ" as it presented itself before them as something to be lived and then shared with others through their example and their writing. The Fathers always presented us with the fullness of

the Gospel so that we, in turn, would not be tempted to reduce that same Gospel to the level of an uninspiring moralism or conventional religious piety.

It is Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444) who explains how the Lord's Baptism establishes the "pattern" and sets an "example" for our own baptism. And Saint Cyril links together baptism and "never-ceasing prayer:" "It was necessary, therefore, that the Word of the Father, when He humbled Himself unto emptiness, and deigned to assume our likeness, should become for our sakes the pattern and way of every good work. For it follows, that He Who in everything is first, in this also set the example. In order, therefore, that we may learn both the power itself of holy baptism, and how much we gain by approaching so great a grace, he commences the work Himself; and having been baptized, prays that you, my beloved, may learn that never-ceasing prayer is a thing most fitting for those who have once been counted worthy of holy baptism."

It is Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (4th c.) who explained the meaning of a Sacrament as a genuine participation in what we could call the reality of grace that lies hidden within—and is then conferred upon the participant—through the rite of the Sacrament. Through "imitation" of the death and resurrection of Christ through the rite of Baptism, we sacramentally die and rise with Christ "in truth:" "O what a strange and inconceivable thing it is! We did not really die, we were not really buried; we were not crucified and raised again; our imitation of Christ was but in figure, while our salvation is truth. Christ actually was crucified and buried, and truly rose again; and all these things have been transmitted to us, that we might by imitation participate in his suffering, and so gain salvation in truth."

A true Baptism must include the invocation of the Holy Trinity, as Christ taught His disciples [Matthew 28:16-20]. Father George Florovsky makes this point clearly: "The Trinitarian invocation is required because outside the Trinitarian faith it is impossible to know Christ, to recognize in Jesus the Incarnate Lord, 'One of the Holy Trinity.'" A fine explanation of the meaning of the Trinitarian invocation and its effect upon the person being so baptized is found in a passage from Saint Nicholas Cabasilas (+14th c.): "As the name of the Trinity is invoked, the candidate is immersed three times in the water and then three times rises up from the water once more; and immediately he enters into possession of all that he seeks. He is born and created; he receives the good seal; he is granted all the happiness that he desires; darkness before, he now becomes light; non-existent before, he now receives existence. God claims him for His own and adopts him as a child. From prison and utter enslavement, he is led to a royal throne."

The water of baptism destroys one life and reveals another; it drowns the old man and raises up the new. To be baptized is to be born according to Christ; it is to receive existence, to come into being out of nothing. And yet, a Sacrament is not some form of "holy magic," as if conferring a kind of mechanically bestowed grace regardless of a person's level of commitment to the life in Christ. The process of salvation—which we often refer to as theosis (deification)—is a synergistic process combining divine grace and human freedom. This also implies an ascetic struggle. We must cooperate with God if we are to experience the transforming grace of Holy Baptism. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (+395) said this well in his Great Catechism: "...If the life after initiation (baptism) is of the same quality as the uninitiated life (before baptism), then, though it may be a bold thing to say, I will say it without flinching; in the case of such people the water is merely water, for the gift of the Holy Spirit in no way shows itself in what takes place.... A child born to any one is entirely akin to his parent. If then you have received God, and have become a child of God, display in the purpose of your life the God that is in you, display in yourself the Father that gave you birth."

A great saint of the more recent past—Seraphim of Sarov (+1833)—places Baptism in the context of one's whole earthly existence. This is part of God's providential care for each of His "adopted" children. If life is indeed a period of testing, then the grace of Baptism, which is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us in the Sacrament, gives us the strength to prevail in this "lifelong test of man on earth:" "And what in the world can be higher and more precious than the gift of the Holy Spirit sent down to us from on high in the Sacrament of Baptism? This grace of Baptism is so great and indispensable, so vital for man, that it is not taken away even from a heretic until his death. That is, it is not taken away from him until the end of the period of appointment on high by God's providence as a lifelong test of man on earth—a test to see what a man can accomplish by means of the strength of grace given to him on high in the time allotted to him by God."

Within the life of the Church, all theology is ultimately best expressed through doxology—the living praise of the living God that brings joy and gladness to our spirits through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Doxology—the glorification of God—is a kind of prayerful/poeticized theology that allows us to approach the mystery of God in Christ with humility and praise. One of the many wonderful hymns of the Feast of Theophany summarizes its theological and spiritual content in a manner befitting the depth of its significance for us: "The true Light has appeared, and grants enlightenment to all. Christ, Who is above all purity, is baptized with us; He sanctifies the water and it becomes a cleansing for our souls. The outward sign is earthly, the inward grace is higher than the heavens; Salvation comes through washing, and through water the Spirit: Descending into the water we ascend to God. Wonderful are Thy works, O Lord: Glory to Thee!"

And so, when all is said and done, in the end we approach God and sing "Glory to Thee!"

UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS

Diocesan Council Meeting

Thursday, January 26 at 11:00 AM
Diocesan Chancery, Bronxville NY

ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL'S NEXT VISIT TO OUR PARISH – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29 FOR PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY

Have you heard of CrossRoad?

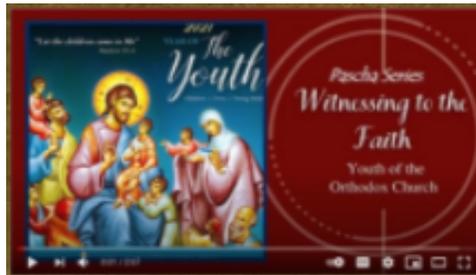
CrossRoad is a ten-day academic summer institute that prepares rising high school seniors and graduating seniors (current 11th and 12th graders) to make big life decisions and invites them to connect with the Orthodox Christian theological and spiritual tradition in a deep and meaningful way.

Please visit www.CrossRoadInstitute.org to learn about their amazing summer sessions in Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. The priority deadline for applying is January 18, 2023, so please spend a moment to learn more.

Youth Witness to the Faith Series

(Presented By Assembly Of Canonical Orthodox Bishops Of The USA)

Includes an Introduction and Four Episodes on Pascha.



WEEKDAY VESPERS AT THE HERMITAGE OF ST OLYMPIA

Weekdays at 4 PM

For information please contact Mother Sophronia at mothersophronia@gmail.com
or via Facebook: Nun Sophronia Hofstead

Saint Seraphim of Sarov, January 2

*With what praise shall we crown the great warrior,
the holy Monk Seraphim?
He revealed himself as the good pastor,
firm in faith and virtue.
His teachings were inspired by God;
his manner of life equal to the Angels.
He taught those who came to him,
and we also cry aloud as we stand before him:
"O Seraphim, pray to Christ our God
to establish the Orthodox faith and to save our souls!"*
Vespers, Litya

